Research Proposal of the Thesis Entitled

Beyond Virtues and Vices: Deconstructing '*Panchkanya*' in Koral Dasgupta's *The Sati Series*

Submitted by

Shilpa Khara

Enrolment no.:202406010013

Ph.D. Scholar

Unitedworld School of Arts and Mass Communication

Under Supervision of

Dr. Shikha Thakur

Associate Professor,

Unitedworld School of Arts and Mass Communication

Karnavati University

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Introduction

Indian mythology has been serviced through the oral storytelling tradition. Commonly, *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* have played their role in influencing the collective unconscious of Indians. The rich tapestry of these epics has majorly covered all the aspects of the human's life journey. These stories are the stories of dynasties, power struggles, the glorious past, wars, the life and livelihoods from the distant past. The epics contain complex philosophies exploring dharma and karma over interpersonal relationships of humans and their relationships with nature (Dasgupta). The social, religious and political fabric of the country traces its connection to these epics.

Other than that, there are chants, music, classical dance, art, and literature that are the records of the enriched past. From these accounts, there is one Sanskrit verse about five women, Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari, popularly known as *Panch Kanyas*-

Ahalya Draupadi Kunti Tara Mandodari tatha/

panca*kanya* smarennityam mahapataka nashaka //

(Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari— the virgins five remembered regularly destroy the greatest failings) (Bhattacharya)

The verse says memorising these five maidens gives humans freedom from severe sins. The irony here is that despite the unconventional life choices they have made, they are believed to be so pure. These women break traditional gender norms, so they become fascinating areas of literary and philosophical exploration. Indian mythology recognizes the *Panchkanya*, who maintain their strength during their most difficult moral battles. These stories demonstrate the complexities of their lives, which were not in line with social expectations. Several cultures identify the *Panchkanya* as enduring life forces while myths portray them as symbols representing major obstacles society presents to its members.

These complex narratives can be simplified for a better understanding of the hidden layers with the use of deconstruction. With the help of deconstruction, it is easy to cover all the aspects dealing which transforms absolute interpretations and established meanings. The contemporary writings of *Panchkanya* deal with present-day cultural and social constructs, gender, individuality and identity issues. This study examines *Panchkanya* through current cultural

approaches because researchers want to understand their social relevance today by connecting present narratives to modern power structures and various life expressions.

Plan of Study

The thesis is planned to be divided into the following chapters:
Introduction
Chapter I: Echoes of *Panchkanya*
Chapter II: Heroines or Outcasts: The Untold Stories
Chapter III: The Five Maidens: Individual Analysis of *Panchkanya*
Chapter IV: Breaking the Binary: Deconstructing Gender
Chapter V: Mythological Revolution: Subverting Gender Norms
Conclusion
Works Cited

Objective of Study

The study aims to examine the modern interpretation of *Panchkanya* through postmodern approaches that deconstruct the philosophical depths of these myths. The research assesses contemporary writing which alters the conventional depiction of *Panchkanya* features through postmodern techniques by dismantling the binary opposition of purity against impurity and loyalty when compared to disobedience along with power versus submission. The research follows gender studies but simultaneously incorporates a postcolonial approach to examine modern *Panchkanya* literature. By using modern intersectionality approaches the research dismantles hegemonic traditions through which *Panchkanya* undergoes transformations into multifaceted gendered symbols. The research has planned to highlight how modern interpretations and character modifications relate to present social and cultural elements in addition to their analysis of present-day reinterpretations.

Brief Introduction to the Chosen Author and Chosen Works

This study focuses on Koral Dasgupta's *The Sati Series*, which is a re-writing of *Panchkanya.* This contemporary narrative is a literary exploration of Indian mythology. Through a modern lens, Dasgupta's works reinterpret narratives of Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Mandodari and Tara. *The Sati Series* includes five books each focusing on one individual *kanya.* Koral has beautifully portrayed conventional stories with nuanced perspectives which align with the

current discourse. Her works are mainly focused on the agency and complexities of these characters.

Literature review

"PANCHA*KANYA*: The Women of Substance", appearing in the Journal of South Asian Literature in 2000, Pradip Bhattacharya has extensively worked on the areas of Hindu mythology and has particularly focussed on female characters. In his various articles, he has explored the five virgins, Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara, and Mandodarias or *Panchkanya* a concept. He has emphasised on dig deeper for the significance and meaning of these *kanya*. He has examined the challenging traditional interpretations of these characters in existing narratives of *Panchkanya* in Hindu mythology. He has also translated Pratibha Ray's novel *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*(1984).

She Who Must Be Obeyed- Draupadi: The Ill-Fated One, Part IV: Five Holy Virgins, Five Sacred Myths by Pradip Bhattacharya. His article delves into the same five women, the Panchakanya, presenting them as figures who challenge conventional ideas of womanhood. It describes the Sanskrit verse that states that remembering them can destroy the greatest sins. The author examines how Ahalya's story was revised in different ways. Tara's story is examined in some detail. The article notes that she is not afraid to advise her husband and his brother and is insightful in her understanding of the political landscape. She is a woman of unusual intellect. The author notes that these women are seen as “kanyas”, or virgins, though some had children. This emphasizes that the virginity is not about physical status, but a "self-sufficiency" or inner wholeness. Also explores how these women use their intelligence and strength to navigate difficult situations and how these stories have been altered across time and texts. The article highlights the unusual circumstances of each woman's life, noting that they often have unconventional relationships and experiences.

Linda Hesss 1999 article "Rejecting Sita: Indian Responses to the Ideal Mans Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife", in her interpretation, examines the complexities in which Sitas persona has been both eulogized and misunderstood by praising as well as problematizing gender, virtue, and agency while she closely works upon the textual sources, the literary interpretations, as well as the cultural practices. Referring to a myriad of Indian sacred texts for instance the Valmiki *Ramayana*, the *Ramcharitmanas*, and many local retellings, Hess pinpoints the process of the evolution of Sitas depiction and the variety of sentiments and

views she has generated in the readers, scholars and devotees throughout diverse chronological and social scenarios. Valentina Radnevic discloses that Goddess Sita has been distorted and glorified as such that positioned her as the epitome of wifely devotion, chastity, and self-sacrifice, while on the other hand, she has been judged, criticized, and betrayed for her passivity, obedience, and inability to stand up to her struggles.

Wendy Doniger's article "Sita and Helen, Ahalya and Alcmena: A Comparative Study," was published in the History of Religions in 1997. Doniger introduces the four women at the outset and places them in their own mythological settings. In the Indian epic Ramayana, Sita is compared to Helen of Troy, whose beauty incited the Trojan War in Greek mythology. Sita is the virtuous wife of Rama. Ahalya, the bewitched and doomed spouse of Gautama Maharishi, is juxtaposed with Alcmena, Heracles' (Hercules') mortal mother, who fell victim to Zeus's seduction in the guise of her spouse.

"Women and the Hindu Tradition" by Susan S. Wadley. She have painted the world of Hindu women using their lifestyles in different cultural settings. The examples are ethnography based and case studies has been done. She addresses the question of how women become agents through instead giving depth to family bonds, esteemed attachment to relatives, and religious stipulations by studying women's physical participation, self-identification, and social mobility. Also, the course encompasses various engaged topics in feminist studies and religious studies, promoting a dialogue on the intertwining factors such as power and image in Hinduism. She scrutinizes the tensions that mark the contact of contemporary feminism with traditional Hindu religious doctrines scrutinizing the way how women's activism and groups have strongly opposed patriarchal systems for the enhancement of gender equality in Hindu communities. Susan Wadley's paper with its subtleties suggests both the gender dynamics, religious beliefs, and social behaviours and at the same time gives a deep and thoughtful reflection on women within the Hindu tradition. In her ethnographic accounts, with the help of her multi-disciplinary research she gives the readers an insight into the wide variety of identities and experiences of Hindu women, which makes the readers to deeply engage in the way that gender, religion and culture work in Indian societies.

"Reclaiming Feminism: Unveiling the Pancha*kanya* in a Decolonial Context," by Bolla Madhavi and Konda Nageswar Rao. The article was published in The Journal Language in April 2016. The highlighted decolonial perspective of the *Panchkanya* aims to explore feminist discourse in the reinterpretations of these female figures. Authors have beautifully unlayered

the societal system that has a major role in constructing women's identity within the patriarchal framework. The piece states that the *Panchakanya* can be seen as a symbol of resistance against patriarchal and colonial oppression. The author is trying to "reclaim" the voices of these women. The article notes that these figures stories are relevant to contemporary feminist movements and can inspire change. The research methodology involves analyzing Hindu mythological texts and using postcolonial feminist theory. It will explore how these women might inspire feminist action. "Nature in Māhātmya of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Līlā" It notes that there is plenty in the text about how nature provides for human beings.The author is concerned with the neglect of nature by humans and seeks to understand how the text might provide an ethical framework for our relationship with the environment. The text is analyzed to show how various characters in the epic value and represent nature. For example, the text suggests that trees are as important as human beings. It discusses how the stories of Krishna guide readers to be more sensitive to nature.

Rohit Sharma's "The Art of Rewriting Indian Epics". is a research paper that examines the process of reinterpreting mythology. The Hindu epics have a great impact on the Indian unconscious. As Sharma has highlighted, the social, cultural, and political fabric of India has a touch of these mythologies. The article has highlighted the rewriting an art as this deals with a very sensitive realm of mythology. It emphasizes that when someone retells an old story, they inevitably make it new in some way. The text highlights that these epics have a sacred status in Hinduism, and that writers must be mindful of this when attempting to rewrite them. It looks at the motives of three authors who rewrote the story of Draupadi, suggesting different reasons and goals for the retellings.

Rashmi Luthras article "Clearin g Sacred Ground: In "Feminist Formations", a journal published in 2014, Besides this Luthra provides gender-specific and social characteristics in relationship to Indians' socialization practices where there is an intersection of gender caste, class, and religion. She talks about how the two sets of systems of identity including disadvantages and oppression of women in the epics are not concerned with one single form of identity but multiple ones which is an important aspect of portraying the epics accurately. Thus, class and gender need to be studied side by side so that remains can be known, if not, inaccurate illustrations and treatment will result. Therefore, Luthras article is an in-depth and probing exploration of the role of women in traditional Indian mythological texts, asking the readers to actively rethink the traditional narrations and look for evidence of a a possible female plot of their own. Her piece is crucial for continuing discourses realized by feminist study and

postcolonialism scholars whose major concern is the area where gender, power and representation overlap in literature and culture.

"The Royal Clan Vs the Marginalised: An Analysis of the Lifestyles of Women in Mahasweta Devi's Pancha*kanya* (Five Women)", 2006. Athista and Baskaran has discussed how the stories of women's lives are portrayed in Mahasweta Devi's "Pancha*kanya*". The authors consider, with the use of the socio-cultural method, the uniqueness of the destinies of women both of the royal lineage and those who are socially disadvantaged, the latter being the main fragment of Devi's literary piece. The introduction of the article sets the scene by giving an overview of Mahasweta Devi's literary works while emphasizing her considerable reputation as a prominent Indian writer who has become well-known for portraying social injustices and marginalized people in a deeply insightful manner. Next, Athista and Baskaran take the audience through the essence of "Pancha*kanya*" wherein they focus on the lives of the five women from all five different social situations. By combining a textual analysis and a socio-cultural perspective, the writer discusses the different female characters' portrayals. They begin by examining how the royal clans and the women with no power in society are defined by their social and economic situation, which bears three dimensions – marriage, work, education, and availability of resources. In this case, Athista and Baskaran incorporate these other dimensions of women's identity in addition to gender to think further about different axes of identity, like caste, class, and class, which shape women's lives.

Viability of the study

The chosen topic deals with the discourse on gender, power and identity, which makes it essential in the contemporary world. The chosen primary and secondary sources on the *Panchkanya* and their reinterpretations are readily available, ensuring the feasibility of the research. The approach used for the study is interdisciplinary covering all possible aspects, which enriches the study incorporating theoretical, cultural and literary perspectives.

Research Methodology

The qualitative research methodology is being used. Where textual analysis will be done by close reading of chosen primary texts and secondary resources on respective literary theories. The descriptive and thematic analysis of reoccurring themes of the texts related to *Panchkanya,*

gender and identity. Allover qualitative research methodology has been used for the detailed analysis of the chosen area.

Chapter Plan

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Conclusion

Indian mythology has a considerable impact on art, culture, literature, education, politics of India. The research has been done to explore the rewritings of mythology. Where *The Sati Series* of Koral Dasgupta has provided a ground for reconsideration of the marginalised female mythological characters. Through which the themes of gender and power has been illuminated in the works of Koral Dasgupta. The female mythological figures have been freshly portrayed in the modern context representing the contemporary power dynamics. The research have focussed on evolving discourse on gender by using Derrida's deconstruction as a tool to dig deeper to revile layers of meanings these texts has to offer. Contemporary writings of these mythology provide different perspectives on the standardization of the traditions and cultural norms. The study have largely surrounded around the role of power dynamics of gender, which has been extensively embedded in the work of Koral Dasgupta.

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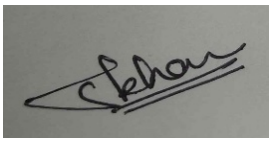

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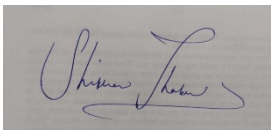

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